

OBITUARY

JUAN GRAU (1917-2009)

Juan Grau, MD, considered the “father of ecology” in Chile, died of lung cancer at his home in Santiago this past July at age 92. Born in 1917 in Santiago, Grau was raised in Spain but returned to Chile where he studied medicine at the Universidad de Chile and specialized in respiratory, allergic, and environmentally-mediated diseases, which later led him to concentrate on studies about atmospheric and water contamination. Grau was one of the first to analyze and discuss Chile’s environmental problems. Grau also did post-graduate studies in Europe and North America and joined the chair of Medicine at the University of Chile in 1946.

He was a physician, ecologist, *bon vivant*, and writer with a knowledge of various languages who published widely on a variety of his passions: ecology, flora and fauna, lapis lazuli, chinchillas, and the perils of smoking. His books ranged from serious scientific studies to works for children. Grau was honored by the Scientific Society of Chile as the most outstanding ecologist for the period 1980-85, he won the

United Nations Environmental Award in 1987, the National Meeting of Science and Culture XXI Century Chile Award in 1992, and he received Chile’s National Environmental Award in 2000. In holding a number of positions of high responsibility, he was the inspiration for the creation of several national parks and nature preserves. And even after his formal retirement, Juan continued as General Secretary of the Chilean Institute of Ecology, a non-governmental agency that he and a group of other visionaries helped to create in 1974.

After nearly two dozen books and countless articles, we mostly knew Juan through his interest in the Chilean wine palm (*Jubaea chilensis*) and its possible connection to the palm of Easter Island. Over the years, we met Juan at conferences, or on Easter Island, or in Chile where we also met his lovely wife. From the Rapa Nui Rendezvous (1993 at Laramie, Wyoming) onward, he never missed a conference concerning Easter Island, and always presented a paper about the Chilean wine palm, discussing it in the context of the extinct Easter Island palm.

He was a kind and delightful man with a great smile. We will miss him.

— The Editors



(Photo courtesy Paul Horley.)